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TWO NEW SABAIC INSCRIPTIONS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A BUILDING AND THE OFFERING OF A RIGHT HAND

This paper concerns two Sabaic inscriptions: the first documents the construction of a private fortified house by subjects of the Sabaean clan Kabīr Ḫalīl. The second is a dedicatory inscription mentioning the offering of a bull statuette and a cast bronze right hand to the god Taʿlab.

Inscription MM10: Construction of a fortified house by a family

This inscribed block belongs to a private collection in a house in the northern oasis of Mārib. According to the owner, it was found in the vicinity. No measurements are available (fig. 1, 2).

The inscription records the construction of a fortified house by a man, his wife, and his two sons. The block is engraved in four lines and may be dated to the first half of the 4th century CE. Only the upper part of the inscription is preserved. Two symbols are engraved at the beginning of the text on either side. The symbol on the right is well-known, primarily from the inscriptions of the Almaqah temple (Awām/Maḥram Bilqīs). The symbol to the left is a spearhead and the symbol of Almaqah combined. It with it might indicate the unification of Sabaʾ and Ḏū-Raydān. A similar symbol is found in CIH 458 (cf. Ryckmans 1996: 135, 140). The inscription now bears the siglum MM 10 (Mārib-Maraqten 10). The author is responsible for the photo and facsimile.

Transcription

rbs^{2}ms^{1}m / yrḥb / wʾṯthw / s^{2}fnṯhw / wbn
yhmy / yḥmd / ws^{2}rḥṯt / bnw / s^{2}qrfm / ʾdm / kbr
ḫll / brʾw / whwṯrn / whs^{2}qrn / mṣnʿthmw / tfs^{2} / brdʾ / wmqm
[…]

Translation

Rabšams Yurḥib and his wife Šafnāṯahw and both his sons
Yaḥmud and Šarḥṯāt of the clan Šaqrafum, subjects of the (clan) Kabīr
Ḫalīl have constructed and laid the foundations and completed their fortress Tafīš by the help and the authority
[…]

Commentary

The owner of the inscription belongs to the bnw s^{2}qrfm, Banū Šaqrafum. This family was subject to the Sabaic clan kbr ḫll, Kabīr Ḫalīl. This quite well-known Sabaic clan is mentioned repeatedly in the inscriptions (Ja 615/13; CIH 80/13; CIH 567/5; CIH 601/19; RES 4966/3; RES 4130/2 etc.). The verb brʾ means "build, construct" (Sab. Dict., 30); the infinitive form hwṯrn of the verbal form hwṯr means, "lay foundations, groundwork" (Sab. Dict., 166). hs^{2}qrn: this is the infinitive form of the verbal form hs^{2}qr "complete, finish" (Sab. Dict., 133). The personal name of the woman, s^{2}fnṯhw, is attested here for the first time and may be translated as "Ṯahw has protected me (or us)", or "protect me, O. Ṯahw!". This compound name consists of the verb s^{2}f (s^{2}wf) "protect, see," personal suffix –n and the theophoric element ṯhw (< ṯhwn), epithet of the god Almaqah. The women's name s^{2}fnṯhw is attested in the form, s^{2}fns^{1}hw (Sholan 1999: 149). — mṣnʿt "fortress, castle" (Sab. Dict., 143): The building completed by the dedicator and his family is mṣnʿt "fortress", possibly understood as, "fortified house". It is not clear whether mṣnʿt here indicates a private "high house" or a "fortified house". The "fortress" bears the name tfs^{2}, Tafīš; cf. the name of a building tfs^{2} attested in a Sabaic inscription (RES 3946/6).

Inscription MṢ1: A dedication to the god Taʾlab for prosperity

This inscription records a private offering to the god Taʾlab, Lord of the temple of Qasāmum. The inscription is engraved in 13 lines on a limestone base for a statuette. The face of the block measures approximately 23x32 cm and is finely carved and complete save for a small chip from the middle of the top and on the lower left-hand size.

The offering consisted of a bronze bull statuette and a cast bronze right hand. The reason for the offering is in gratitude for Taʾlab's providing the dedicator and his family with fine crops. This inscription is significant because it adds a new eponym to those known in the kingdom of Sumʿay. The inscription must be dated, on the basis of paleographic criteria, to the second or third century CE. The inscribed block is held in a private collection in Ṣanʿāʾ and now bears the Siglum MṢ1 (= Maraqten Ṣanʿāʾ 1). The author is responsible for the photo and facsimile.

Transcription

hʿn / wbnyhw / qs^{2}bm / bny / ḥs^{2}km
hqnyw / s^{2}ymhmw / tʾlb / bʿl / qs^{1}m
m / ḏn / ṯwrn / wymnn / ḥgn / s^{2}fthw
ʿbdhw / hʿn / lḥmd / ḫyl / wmqm / s^{2}
ymhmw / tʾlb / bʿl / qs^{1}mm / bḏt
ḫmrhmw / tʾlb / ṯwbnhmw / fql
ṣdqm / bn / ms^{2}myhmw / bḫrf / ʾlw
fd / ʾmrm / yhs^{3}ḥm / wlwzʾ / tʾlb
s^{1}ʿdhmw / ʾfql / ṣdqm / bn / ms^{2}myhmw
wl / gybhmw / tʾlb / bn / brdm / wʾ
ḏym / wḥbrm / wbnkl / qmltm / w
l / ḫrynhmw / bn / nḍʿ / ws^{2}ṣy / s^{2}nʾ
m / ḏrḥq / wqrb / btʾlb / rymm



Fig. 1. Inscription MM10 (photo)

Translation

Ha‘‘ān and his son Qāšibum of the clan Ḥāšikum
dedicated to the patron god Ta’lab, lord of (the temple)
Qasāmum this bull statuette and the right hand as he promised to Him, namely
His worshipper Ha‘‘ān in gratitude to praise the power and the authority of
their patron god Ta’lab, Lord of (the temple) Qasāmum because
Ta’lab granted them and rewarded them with fine
crops from their fields in the eponymate year of ’Īlwafad,
Amīrum Yuhasḥim. May Ta’lab continue to
grant them fine crops from their fields.
And may Ta’lab protect them against any cold season,
damage, sorcery and from every insect pest. May He
deliver them from evil and harm by any enemy,
far or near. By (the authority) of Ta’lab Riyāmum

Commentary

Lines 1-2. The dedicator calls himself *h‘n*. He made the offering with his son *qs^{2}bm.*

— *h‘n,* Ha‘‘ān: The name *h‘n* was popular in the nomenclature of South Arabia; it appears frequently in Sabaic *as h‘n, h‘nm* (Tairan 1992: 221), cf. also *h‘nm* in Qatabānic (Hayajneh 1998: 255). The vocalization of this name as Ha‘‘ān is based upon its occurrence in Al-Hamdānī (cf. Abdallah 1975: 94).

— *qs^{2}bm,* Qāšibum: This personal name appears here for the first time in the inscriptions; see the Sabaic female name qs^{2}bt (Sholan 1999: 140) and the Sabaic clan name *bny qs^{2}bm* (MṢM 4498).

— *ḥs^{2}km,* Ḥāšikum: No evidence from the inscriptions is available.

— *s^{2}ym-hmw* "their patron god".

— *t’lb,* Ta’lab: This deity, usually known as Ta’lab Riyām, was the main deity of the tribe and the kingdom of Sum‘ay, north of Ṣan‘a’. It is known from several inscriptions (Höfner

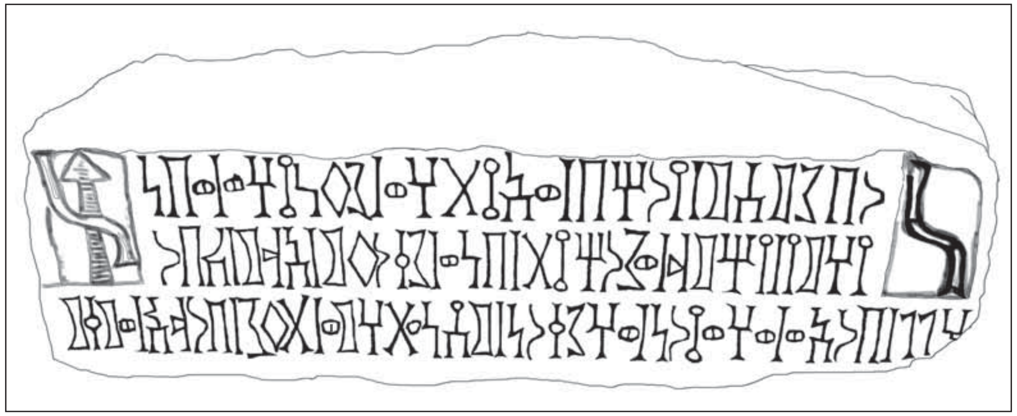


Fig. 2. Inscription MM10 (facsimile)

1970: 254-257; Arbach-Schiettecatte 2012: 37-68). In our inscription, the deity is described as *b‘l qs^{1}mm,* Lord of Qasāmum. Apparently *qs^{1}mm* is a designation for a temple of worship for the god Ta’lab. The temple name *qs^{1}mm* might relate to its function as a place of oracles; it derives from the South Arabian root QS^{1}M "oracular decision" (Sab. Dict., 108).

— *ḥgn / s^{2}ft-hw* "as he promised Him": This phrase is well-attested in the Sabaic inscriptions (i.e. al-Jawf 04.16/3-4; FB-as-Sawdā’ 1/5).

Lines 3-6. The dedication made to the god Ta’lab was *ṯwrn* and *w-ymnn.*

— *ṯwr* is here considered to be a "bull statuette". We have good data about bulls, including bull-statuettes, in South Arabian inscriptions (Sima 2000: l46-154). Our document mentions another offering, namely *ymnn*. The noun *ymn* means "right, right hand". In our text, it is the offering of a right hand. We can imagine it to be similar to an inscribed bronze hand dedicated to the god Ta’lab Riyāmum in the British Museum collections dated to the 3^{rd} century CE (British Museum no. BM 139443 = 1983, 0626.2). It has been published by Chr. Robin (Robin 1: cf. Robin 1985: 315-318; Simpson 2002: 173, and no. 221). We have two examples of the dedication of a right hand in ancient Yemen, both to the god Ta’lab. The right hand occurs as the symbol of a deity, possibly of the god ‘Aṯtar and is known to be apotropaic (Höfner 1965: 508f.), especially on dedicatory inscriptions, rock inscriptions and drawings (Simpson 2002: nos. 26, 31). The right hand was also considered to be a symbol of good fortune. This dedication was made in thanksgiving for *ṯwbn-hmw fql ṣdqm*: The term *fql, pl. ’fql* means "crops" and *fql ṣdqm* may be translated as "fine crops" (Sab. Dict., 45). The verb *ṯwb* means "reward, recompense worshipper (deity)" (Sab. Dict., 151).

— *ms^{2}my-hmw:* This is a plural of ms^{2}m "cultivated area, field" and is attested for the first time and can be reconstructed as **mašāmī* (see also the plural forms ms^{2}ym; *ms^{2}mt, ms^{2}ymt* (Sab. Dict., 136).

Lines 7-8. After giving the reason for the dedication, the dedicator records the date, *b-ḫrf ’lwfd ’mrm yhs^{3}ḥm* "in the eponym year of ’Īlwafad, Amīrum Yuhasḥim". This eponym is attested for the first time here and seems to have been a local dating system in the kingdom of Sum‘ay. Unfortunately, our document does not mention royal names. However, this dating formula is nevertheless significant for the Sabaean dating system.



Fig. 3. Inscription MṢ1 (photo)



Fig. 4. Inscription MṢ1 (facsimile)

Lines 9-13. The inscription starts at the end of line eight with a request to the god to continue granting the dedicator fine fruits from their fields (*ms²ym-hmw*) and ends at line nine. The text continues in lines 10 and 11 with more requests to protect the dedicator and his clan against cold seasons (*brd*) and against the activities of several evil doers.

— *gyb-hmw*: the Sabaic verb gyb means “defend, protect” (Sab. Dict., 51).

— *ʾḏym*: This noun occurs for the first time in the ancient South Arabian inscriptions; cf. Arabic aḏīya “damage, harm, injury, trouble”. The term *ḥbr* “sorcery” is known from other inscriptions (Sab. Dict., 65).

— *qmltm* “insect pest, locusts”: This term is attested several times in Sabaic documents (Sab. Dict., 105). The text continues with the typical request for protection against evil and harm by any enemy and ends with a closing formula by the authority of Ta’lab Riyāmum, namely the main figure in the worship of Ta’lab.

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CONTENTS

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